

A Princess Story

By

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Munachi Mbonu Books

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Me

MY NAME IS Adaeze Dike. I'm princess. Or so I have come to determine my world. In Umudim village, I'm one of a kind. I know how special it is for me to be who I am. This moment, as I look in the mirror, I can see my face, but not my image. My image is larger than what a piece of mirror can reflect. That's the simple truth. I'm princess and I live in my world. Umudim must realise someday how uniquely blessed it is to have a remarkable

personality like me as a daughter of its soil. In fact, as its princess. Happily, they're beginning to understand this. At school these days, things are changing fast. I'm becoming the centerpiece of attraction. Both teachers and classmates accord me high honour because they are waking up to the reality that Adaeze is Princess. Nothing changes that. Or how else could it be said? The truth is what it is - Adaeze is Adaeze. She alone is princess. And there can't be two. Only one Ada.

Just right now, see how I look. It could only be me. Certainly, I'm no common person. The fun part is that those who ought to know are taking notice. I have said that before. Draping a pink hair packer that I got from my mother's hair salon to tie my hair into a ponytail, brushing my hair back as I croon a beautiful baroque Bach - (by the way, who else knows Bach in Umudim? But Princess does) - is it not only logical that my respect not be half and my honour

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not be small, but be full. Not a fraction but the whole. This is why they must respect me to the latter. This morning alone, my ensemble is something else. I'm adding a brown burette on a yellow shirt with a matching brown pinafore. My burette is tilted just enough for my pink hair band to show.

Again, I ask the question. How many are we? Or how many could we be? My latest look in the mirror is yet another affirmation. Dead in the eye: Adaeze is the only princess in this village. Mu wa. Adaeze.

Some say you can only be called a princess if you are of royal birth. Perhaps it's the truth. Perhaps it's their truth. But as far as I know, a princess is a princess. And a princess I am. Full stop. Come to think of it, why do I need biology to be called one. Adanna, the king's daughter, Igwe's only pride and diadem, lives in the palace. Her father holds court there. She is my age. We share a birthday. We look alike. We

could be twins and could be blood. Who knows? I didn't bring this upon myself. I think royalty has been forcing itself upon me from the very day of my birth. And right into my teens (I'm 15 and in JSS3), the facts just won't go away. My parents think I'm delusional. They can't stop laughing each time I remind them I'm a princess. Princess Adaeze. Not just Adaeze. Anybody can be that. Not mu wa. But the perplexing puzzle even they can't seem to answer, is why the coincidences are so eerily what they are.

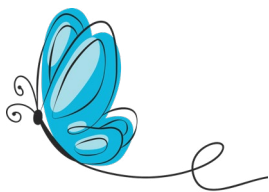
Surely there's more to my destiny than my current status. I believe I am blue blood. And that's all that makes the difference. After all, see how I go to great lengths to look prim and proper. Does even Adanna do this? Does she consciously wear the badge of her birth?

What do I feel for Adanna? Resentment? So? Dislike? Possibly. And possible that I actually covet her fortune and judge her unfairly that whatever she has should have

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been mine or should be mine too. But what could I do? Or what could I say? Cry and daydream all I want? Of course not. I will carry myself all I can and exude the princess that is truly in me. That's how I will wear my crown as Princess of Umudim. Birth or no birth. Biology or no biology.

How do I know it has worked? How else except by the reception I get everywhere I now turn? On my way to school, you'd think I sat in a carriage feted by angels. I'm literally chauffeured by the hailing along the way. Vendors, hawkers, shopkeepers, petty traders, etc.... everyone now sings my song. Nothing remains the same anywhere my name was mentioned. I am Princess.



At School

SCHOOL WAS PARADISE. Or close to it.

It was about my name. In class, it was a game changer. Among staff, it commanded awe. Every student knew that Adaeze was Adaeze, she was the king's daughter. Adaeze I of Umudim. No other name did what mine did. My name moved earth. Literally, anywhere.

If I ever crossed paths with my juniors, they'd make sure to greet me till they got

my attention.

“Princess Ada!”

Often, they screamed over one another, if only to make sure I replied to each one distinctly. But from me, a royal wave was enough to do the magic; always keeping a straight face to tend the myth. My classmates who believed that I was truly Princess Adanna’s sister couldn’t get over the feeling of having a royal among them.

I was the Princess of the class as far the pecking order went. They always reserved a special front row seat for me and in the middle, they saved my bag space. When it was break-time, I’d walk outside to play and all of them would follow me. If I wanted to play a particular game, they would simply comply and play it allowing me to always win. If I didn’t win, the winner would find an excuse to make me the winner. Sometimes I wondered if they were truly comfortable with the fact that they stood no chance of winning. Within me, I really couldn’t be

bothered. I was Princess after all. Adaeze mu wa. I was the leader of the class. That was natural. Tochi my best friend, was more like my amour bearer, a kind of aide-de-camp. She never put her opinion ahead of whatever I said.

One day, on my way to school, I tripped and fell into mud. My dress was stained. I had abrasions on my knees. It was not a very good sight. I was very close to the school gate and I didn't think I should go back home, considering the time. I had one plan: go to school, use the bathroom, head to class.

Luckily, I ran into Tochi and the other girls. But they wouldn't hasten to assist me. They were looking on. Throwing my bag on the floor in utter rage, I thundered:

"Help me clean this up. Can't you see your princess is so dirty." Still, that didn't change anything.

"Hello? Are you deaf? I said help me." I raised my pinafore high enough for them, especially for Tochi to see my stains. They

look at each other then look back at me. I knew they couldn't be joking anymore. Something had gone wrong. "Can't you help yourself? Or will your royal arms come off your body if you did? What does it cost a princess to fix so little a thing as what you want us to help with? I thought it was a dream. I knew I heard their words but I was wondering what they really meant by such a sudden rebellion, which was just unexpected.

Tochi was gearing up to continue dressing me down when I sputtered first. "How could you? What a friend you've become, if you ever were one. You're such a..." They caught up with me and we had verbal hostilities.

"Now you go take a good look at yourself in the mirror, princess or whatever it is you want us to call you and tell the world if you have been a friend all this while."

I just stood there in utter disbelief.

What just happened? I thought I always walked behind a glass wall. Now it's being shattered.

My heart was heated as I struggled to come to terms with the scene that had just played out in front of me. I was juggling ideas of how best I would punish Tochi and the other girls for their rebellion by turning the whole class against them for what they had done. They must think now that they've come of age and can do as they like. I must cut them to size. At least, so I thought.

The mud didn't come off completely even though I'd spent considerable time cleaning it. I was running late for the day's classes by now so I picked myself up and headed for our classroom. On arrival, I opened the door and immediately headed for my seat but soon noticed that it had been taken. By whom? Tochi, of course.

On a day like this, my teacher could have intervened to help me settle down quickly and gracefully. She knows very

well that I'm Princess. What she said was different. It made matters worse. "Hello madam Adaeze, why are you late"

I didn't even respond. "Get out!" I yelled at Tochi. I know now that I was fighting a war on two battlefronts. "Adaeze, sit down or leave my class!" I turned again to Tochi who actually couldn't face me. "I'll deal with you later."

I murmured loud enough for her to hear. "You can't do anything," she retorted. It was like a playback of the bathroom scene, or we were continuing where we left off there. Everyone in the class heard and started giggling. I walked to the only available seat at the back next to the waste can. As I sat down there, the people in front of me kept shifting their chairs and tables away, like I was being quarantined. What was going on? Did Tochi put everyone up to this?

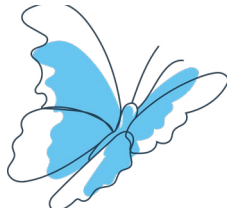
When it was break time, I made yet another stop at the bathroom before I

went outside where everyone else was. I was fuming. How could she do this to me? How could anyone? Approaching the playground, everyone seemed to have encircled Tochi, who was apparently dishing out marching orders. I approached them, hoping they'll disperse in my direction. That didn't happen. I had never been this troubled in all my life. But I held it together and spoke my mind with even stronger boldness. "Hello? Why are you people around this silly girl? Do you know what she did today?"

My words momentarily distracted them. But that's as far as it went. Without responding, they turn back to Tochi. It was then Tochi motioned to the group to give her a moment. "Adaeze, just shut up. You are not a princess. You lied to everyone here. My father confirmed from the palace itself that you are no relation to princess Adanna. You have treated all of us here like your servants instead of respecting us.

Please just get out and fix yourself, princess my foot.”

Tochi’s words were the group’s words. Some nodded. Some hailed her. Here I was. High and dry. It was then that the shivers finally came over me. I stood there frozen. The classroom that I thought I had under control suddenly turned against me. For the first time in forever, I could feel tears snaking slowly down my face. I turned back and walked into the school building while they sang and played my favourite games. It felt like a stab in the back. Instead of waiting in the classroom as I usually did, I ran back home in tears.



Relief

“**ADA, WHY ARE** you back from school so early today?” My mum asked as she put down the lathered shirt she was washing back into the bucket and walked towards me. Words barely came out of my mouth. It felt like thick cables tied up my vocal cords. I just wrapped my arms around her waist and continued crying. She patted me on the back softly which calmed me down.

Finally, I spoke. My voice was shaky.

"Mama, everyone at school hates me. All of my friends have left me."

"Adaeze. I don't get you. So, you're telling me you ran away from school because your friends turned against you?"

"They found out I'm not a real princess, so they started ignoring me and refused playing with me. They've all shunned me. I said, still sobbing.

"My uniform got stained and none of them cared to help me."

I continued, showing her my uniform. She hugged me again. Tighter this time. But we're both silent. "Let's go and see her." I thought she meant Tochi but I was wondering why so I asked in order to be sure.

"See who mummy?"

"The princess herself."

"Really? Is that possible? When can that even happen? Don't we have to be invited first?" My face brightened up at the prospect, at last. What would it mean? To finally meet the Princess herself.



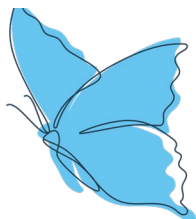
A Possible Visit

UNTIL NOW, I had never thought of what it would mean, to stand in the presence of royalty. My mother made the arrangements in earnest. Going to the palace can be quite a big deal for a lot people in Umudim. My mother assured me that with my uncle

as prime minister, things wouldn't be too difficult for us accessing the king's court. That's how it played out.

"Ada-Ada, your uncle is Onowu, the Prime Minister. He will be able to get us time with her. Give it one or two days for the approval."

It happened exactly so. But the intervening days were a hell for me at school. I had no one to talk to or play with, or to share the news with, that I was about to go and see the princess finally. My classmates deliberately ignored me. My juniors were even more spiteful. Only the teachers managed to keep their distance from being punitive towards me. Everything turned upside down. The only thing that kept me sane was my appointment at the palace. Within I was happy, without I was sad.



Visit to the Palace

THE DAY FINALLY came. I did my usual hair routine except with a bigger pink hairband that matched the rest of my clothes which were the best I had. Most importantly, I prayed for a good time with the princess. We rode in a tricycle all the way to the palace. It was quite a distance from our

home. I noticed my heart skipping beats when we approached the palace. The sight was unmistakable. The gates, made of shiny black iron and gold, looked ten feet tall. The palace itself was much taller than the gates. It was wide and had enough space around it. There were three big black cars parked under a shade in one corner.

The palace looked like the ones from the story books, except with the thoroughly built buff men surrounding the gate. At the entrance, we had approached them nicely, hoping they won't chase us away. "Good afternoon gentlemen. I'm Nenna Dike, sister of Uchenna Dike. Is my brother around please?" My mum threw the question at one of them. "Please hold on while I confirm." He answered in a baritone before entering the security house. I stood behind my mum for several minutes under the hot sun before the man returned.

"You may enter." Security personnel are perhaps like that. They don't say more

where less would do.

I held my mum's hand and admired the compound once we got in; its garden and the maids going in and out all seemed to have a rhythm to it.

The guard opened the door for us only to see our uncle on the phone waiting for us.

"Ada-Ada" he said. It had been long since I saw my uncle. He was staring wide-eyed as if he hadn't been expecting us. He then gave me a hug and ushered me by hand through a hallway. The hallway had life-sized pictures of the king and his small family. I finally enter the main room where the king is seated on the throne with a little girl by his side.

Unconsciously, I curtsy and bow my head down along with my uncle and my mother. "Your Highness," my uncle said. I slowly lift up my head to see the girl beside the king had turned towards us. It was Princess Adanna. He continued, "Igwe, this

is my niece. The girl we talked about that so desperately wanted to see your daughter.”

Princess Adanna’s eyes slowly widen, but her face remains straight, like she was hiding her excitement.

“Princess Adanna,” I say, taking another bow. “My name is Adaeze,” I say looking at her with a smile hoping she reciprocates it.

“Hello Adaeze,” she returns the smile and bows back. I look confused as to why she bowed back to me. Isn’t that meant for the princess’ subjects? “Can she follow me to my room Papa? Please?” She begged.

“Alright then. Follow her,” he gestured to the maid to accompany us. The interior of the palace was monumental. It had a staircase with great aesthetic design. We went up the stairs that led to the first room. Her room did not go below my expectations. It was big, impressively big, with everything being made of gold, fine wood or fine pink furniture.

“You really do get everything you want,

don't you?" I couldn't hide my admiration. It was tinged with jealousy. Not sure if she noticed.

"Of course not," she giggled. "Aren't you a princess after all? You only have to snap your fingers and whatever you want just comes to you."

Her countenance went from jovial to confused. "Who gave you that impression? Things don't work like that. For my father, maybe yes, but for me? Never" Her answer shocked me but I managed to hide it. We went on like that talking about food, festivals, school and especially how we share so much in common despite not being related.

"We are probably sisters." She said it jokingly. "Do you have a lot of friends come around here?" I asked as I lay on her soft bed. "Not at all, I'm even surprised you were able to come inside. I only see much older people and rarely see my age mates." She sounded really sad. "How are your friends

at school like?" She asked casually.

My heart ached at once. A single tear drop did flow. I managed to find the words to narrate my predicament.

It was here I released that royalty couldn't be grabbed. She was calm and simply asked me.

"Do you think you've been a true princess all this while? Forget that you are not from the royal family. Do you believe that's how a princess treats people?"

I stared hard at her in confusion. Not sure I had an answer. Much less the right answer.

So, she helped me.

"The correct answer is no. Your story tells me you've been a dictator all the while. A true princess would never behave in that way. A true princess has manners, charisma, respect for others and their opinions. Princesses are meant to be charming, responsible and polite. That's what my mother says to me all the time." I

remained silent. This is the first time I was encountering royalty itself. Her humility disarmed me. Yet her correction sunk so deep. Not even my mum had corrected me this way. There was a reality check.

So, all this while I had been a bully and not an actual princess. No wonder they turned their back on me.

Her voice had a certain assertive quality to it.

"If a princess is rude, irresponsible and unable to take care of herself," she then continued, "her citizens would force her out of the throne. Technically, they are not your citizens, but your friends. You are very lucky to have friends. You make sure to keep them."

I endured the lecture while it lasted. It was painful but I knew I needed it.

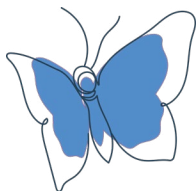
The conversation lasted for another hour before the court announced that the visit had to end.

On our way home, I told my mum

about my encounter with the princess and how we had clicked so seamlessly. I thought she was listening disinterestedly until she laughed. I was surprised. She laughed because I hinted that the princess and I may have already become best friends and that I thought I might be invited to the palace more often.

I didn't realize why she laughed until it dawned on me that I was putting too much weight on a meeting of a few hours in which I had gone to be taught correction.

"No be me and you go dey waka go palace everyday you hear?" She laughed a little more, pulling my ear.



A New Princess

AT HOME, I went back to the bathroom mirror as I usually did every morning before going to school. It's my turn to know me better. I must be better to do better. Adaeze must become a new and better Adaeze.

She must rise up to the responsibility. First, go to class and ask for the forgiveness

of her classmates whom she deceived so desperately about whom she was. She must give them time to respond, not force them to forgive her overnight. She must not seek any special privileges again. She will be Adaeze and others will be others. Everyone being someone.

I went back to school and did what was right. Amazingly, it didn't take long before my friends welcomed me back into their fold. They were so kind.

We did everything we usually did in the past but now as equals. When we played games, the winner emerged by merit and not by privilege.

On my way to school, I made sure I was the first to greet anyone I met on the road including junior students that crossed my path. I cultivated my relationship with Princess Adanna because I had a lot to learn from her. In time, I was her regular guest at the palace.

Even that was not enough for me to

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brag about. I didn't tell anyone. I did the opposite instead, because, it was by getting close to the princess, that I learnt true humility.

The End